

It is October 3, 1996. This is an oral history project being done with Vesta Lincoln Gould at her house on Route 6, Eastham. The interviewer is Rosemary Abbott.

Question: How long have you lived in Eastham?

Answer: I was born here and raised here.

Q: Did you ever live away from Eastham?

A: Not to live but I taught school in Fairhaven and Dedham.

Q: What was your husband's name?

A: His name was Alvers. We had one child, a daughter, Janet.

Q: They are the ones who just came to visit you?

A: Yes. They live in North Carolina.

Q: Where did you live when you were growing up in Eastham?

A: Right across the street from where I live now. It was the house next to my grandfather's house. My grandfather had a large house with a barn attached. His name was Hinckley Lincoln. My mother was a Lincoln. The house is still there but I don't know the name of the people who live there. As you go up here it is the first house on the right hand side.

Q: Did they own this property, too? (where you live)

A: No, they didn't. A captain of a ship did, Captain Clarrington Smith. He owned the house across the street. This land was used as an asparagus farm. He raised asparagus after he gave up going to sea. The land down to the Cove and up as far as the Anchorage was asparagus. Including the land where the Anchorage is now. No trees.

Q: Did they have any of those salt works out in front on the Cove?

A: No, I don't know anything about those.

Q: You went to the elementary school in Eastham?

A: Yes, then I went to the Orleans High School. They had nine grades at the elementary school when I went there. Those who went to high school went to Orleans.

Q: Do you remember how you got there?

A: We had a bus, called a barge, drawn by horses.

Q: Do you remember some of the other people in your classes at the elementary school?

A: Yes, Abbie Nickerson. She was a sister-in-law to Winifred Knowles.

Q: Was she Otto Nickerson's sister?

A: No, that was another Abbie Nickerson. Otto's sister lived in Orleans.

- A: This Abbie Nickerson lived down in Eastham by the railroad track - where you cross the bike path now.
- Q: That corner house, yellow with the mansard roof at the corner of Samoset and Bridge?
- A: That's right. I also remember Ignor Rongner. He lives down in Florida now. He and his father lived on the way to the Coast Guard beach. Not far from Doane Rock, on the left of Doane Rock. Just after Nauset Road goes north. His father was in the Coast Guard.
- Q: Do you remember who the teachers were?
- A: Florence Keith was a teacher. She lived on the way to the coast Guard beach, on the left on a private dirt road. Florence Keith was here for years.
- Q: When you were there, was the building made of three sections put together?
- A: Yes. We had three teachers. Otto Nickerson and we had several other grade teachers.
- Q: Was Virginia Horton one of the teachers?
- A: no, she was in my age group.
- Q: How many children were there in your age group?
- A: We had three grades in the room. There must have been fifteen or eighteen. Miss Blanchard was one of the teachers. She was related to the Brewers. Truman Brewer and I were in the same class.
- Q: When you first went to school was it in the Old Town Hall?
- A: I went to school in the Old Town Hall. Then they put the schools together. They had had buildings around in different parts of the Town. One in the north part of the Town and one in the south, and one that is the museum now. Then they decided to put them together. Then they needed transportation. So they had this system of the barge pulled by horses and they'd go to each section to pick up the children and come after them in the afternoon. They had a well outside, right outside the schoolhouse. I don't know what they did to keep it from freezing in the winter.
- Q: By the time you taught there did they have water inside?
- A: Oh, yes. Wait a minute. I taught eight years and then I got married. I used to substitute down there in the old school once in a while. Then the new school was built.
- Q: That was in 1936?
- A: Yes, and my husband worked on it. Oscar Pierce built it, I think. My husband worked for Oscar Pierce. My husband was a builder.

Q: Where did you learn to be a teacher?

A: I went to Hyannia Normal School. That was a two year course. While I went there I lived in the dormitory. Then I went to Fairhaven to teach. Two years. Then I went to Dedham. I was there six years. Then I got married and came home.

Q: Do you remember what kinds of things you did in the wintertime?

A: In the wintertime there was always a play put on by some group or another. We had dances on Friday nights in the winter, too. They were at the Town Hall in Orleans, the building up on the hill. About every week. We had an orchestra that played. Adeline Knowles and I used to ride our bikes to the dance. We weren't afraid to ride at night. Adeline Rogers Knowles and Raymond Knowles lived in the house just by the cemetery. We had suppers, too, of baked beans and brown bread at the church (Orleans Methodist Church). The women's group at church put them on. My mother had to bake a lot of things. Each woman did. They all helped by making something. She'd make pies and beans and also brown bread. Everyone looked forward to going to the suppers. The Methodist Church in Orleans had a building which is where the bicycle shop is now (at present 1996 futon shop). Next to where Ellis Market used to be (present auto parts store). We used to have prayer meetings there, too. We'd have different groups meet there.

Q: Thanksgiving?

A: Yes, we celebrated Thanksgiving. Frank Lincoln and his family came to our house. He was my uncle.

Q: Christmas?

A: We used to get presents. I remember one year we got fourteen games as presents! We had an aunt who lived in Somerville and she always sent us presents. My brothers and I used to like to play games and do puzzles.

Q: Do you remember what summertime was like?

A: One of the great things was the Barnstable Fair. It was in Barnstable on Route 6A at the top of the hill before you go down to the Court House. There was a huge white building. It was a really big affair with prizes for different things i.e. vegetables, poultry. There was horse racing. There was an excursion train to take you right to the Fair. You had to go to Orleans to get on the train. The train went up in the morning and came back at night. Everyone saved their money so they could go on the train.

A: Of course, we did have summer people who came down to Eastham. Joe Cobb used to take summer visitors. He lived down in Eastham near where the Old Town Hall building is. (Chester and June Ranlett's house at present). Joe Cobb lived on that road (Salt Pond Road) by the Hilltop Restaurant. That was his land where the restaurant is, just in back of it is his house. He'd meet them at the railroad station and bring them down to his house for a week or two. Then he'd take them around to different places to see the sight.

Q: Was he any relation to the Chases?

A: Yes, Joe Cobb's daughter married Leslie Chase. Mabel Cobb Chase. This was before there were many automobiles. They had horses. Joe Cobb had horses. The train went to Provincetown. One train went down about noontime and went back at three o'clock in the afternoon. One came down at night about seven and that went back the next morning about seven or eight, back to Boston.

Q: Where did you get your mail when you were growing up?

A: It was delivered to the house. Our mail used to come to Orleans - for years our mail came through Orleans - much nearer than Eastham. The mail wagon was very narrow. Had a horse. We had a mailbox out by the road. He'd come around every day. We used to have a man who came around with the Sunday paper. He was from Orleans, too. When you don't have any means of transportation it was closer to go to Orleans. Tommy Smith was in Orleans with a grocery store, that is now Ellis'. Sadie Flint's father used to have a meat wagon. He'd come around once a week. After awhile he had a market in Orleans. There was a building on the way to Orleans Center and that was where his market was, just before you get to the first traffic signal. Her father lived in Orleans. Her mother died when her brother was born. I think she lived with her grandparents down here on Smith Heights. They had cottages on the water there.

Q: Have you seen what they are doing to the Orleans Inn?

A: Yes, isn't it nice. It used to be a nice-looking building. Used to have a purple top, you know. Way up on the second or third floor. That distinguished it from everything else.

Q: Do you remember anything about the building when you were younger or growing up?

A: Yes, we used to go there until a few years ago. It never could make a go of it, I don't know why.

Q: In the old days when you were young it must have been quite a place.

A: I think it was private at that time. Man by name of Snow. Where the windmill is now was a nice looking house, too. It was a pretty street there. Nice looking houses. Down in East Orleans there were lovely looking places. You don't see any of these nice places anymore.

Q: When you were a senior in high school, did you take a trip?

A: The year we were supposed to go we didn't have enough money. 1919. So we went to Boston for a weekend. We stayed at a hotel, went Friday and came back Sunday. We went to special buildings and we had a good time. I think there were twelve or fourteen of us.

Q: At your mother and father's house when you were growing up, did they have a vegetable garden?

A: Oh yes, everybody had a garden. My father had a cranberry bog, too. My father's bog was down back of the house. My father was in the Coast Guard but he didn't like that and looked forward to the time when he could get out and have a farm. We had asparagus beds over in the woods back there. I can remember working in the cranberry bog pulling weeds. They had fruit trees, too, apple trees, four different kinds. Grapes. We canned tomatoes and made piccalilli.

Q: When you were growing up, what kind of heat did you have in the house?

A: Stoves, burning wood or coal. We used to have something called a "gas burner" in the living room. Bedrooms were cold. We still had a stove when we were married and lived in the apartment at my grandfather's house. Never had central heat in the house. When we built the first cottage where we lived before we built this house, we didn't have central heat either. In the winter we blocked up the fireplace with a screen made of zinc fitted right in the fireplace with a hole for the stovepipe. It burned oil or kerosene. Lots of people had their kitchen stove converted to use oil or kerosene.

Q: Did your mother make your clothes when you were growing up?

A: Yes, she did. She made all the clothes for all of us until the boys went to school. She was a good seamstress.

Q: Where did you meet your husband?

- A: He lived in Orleans. I guess I met him when I was in high school. The high school put on a play, the senior class. We had it in the Town Hall (Orleans). I met him at a school play. They had the play and then they had a dance afterwards. Alvers's sister, Helen Clark, who passed away last winter, was in my class in high school. Charles Knowles was in my class, too. He lived down here in what is now the motel (Eagle Wing Motel). The center part was their house. He had a brother Raymond.
- Q: There are a lot of Knowles around! I worked for Ed Macomber and his mother was a Knowles.
- A: His mother, Della Knowles Macomber, was my best friend. Ed's sister was just here in my cottage down by the water for two weeks. She lives in California. She did the Cape from one end to the other. She's interested in this history too. Della Macomber and I taught school together. She had fifth grade and I had first and second when I first went there to teach. Then I had just the first because of the increase in pupils. When I first was teaching there I had about fifteen in two grades.
- Q: After you got married where did you live?
- A: We lived in my grandfather's house. There were two apartments. It was next door to where my mother lived. Then when the war came - 1942 - the school superintendent said they needed a new teacher. The teacher they had, she was from Brewster, named Newcomb, was leaving. But they had only a few children. And they had three teachers. They wanted to divide the children up so they needed another teacher. They put in lunches too. They thought they'd get someone to teach and take care of the lunches. That was too much. I had cooked for myself but never for a group. This was in the new school - which had a kitchen in the basement.
- Q: So which did you do - cook or teach?
- A: Oh, I taught.
- Q: By the time of the war were you living in this house?
- A: No, I've been here only 37 years. We lived up in my grandfather's house. We always wanted to have a home of our own so we bought this land. It was owned by Captain Clarrington Smith who lived across the street. Two acres. This Captain Smith had four children.

- A: Two girls and two boys. He divided this land between them. Had it surveyed and marked off. Whoever bought this land had the privilege of buying the house across the street if they wanted to. The next one went to one of the girls, so we bought the two lots. It took about all the money we had. Gradually we got enough together to build a house. The house down by the water - built in 1947. The other house down by the water was built in 1950. The house we are sitting in was built in 1959. The first one was built as a cottage but we liked it so much we lived down there. Some of the winters it was kind of cold. When we built this house there were no trees. I could see way up to the yacht club. In 36 years they have all grown. The trees to the north seeded themselves (toward Powers house).
- Q: Was the house to the north beside the highway there?
- A: Yes, Joe Ryder lived there. He had an asparagus farm over by the bay. His asparagus farm was right on the river at Boat Meadow. Was on the left side (Bay View Road). Beyond the Reynolds house the field went straight from there to the bay.
- Q: The asparagus that was grown here on this land - who owned that?
- A: Captain Clarrington Smith.
- Q: When you were growing up did he still have asparagus growing?
- A: Yes, but he didn't have all of it. He had sections of it that were put into asparagus. We used to find wild asparagus after we owned the property.
- Q: By the time you were grown and married and living at your grandfather's house was asparagus still being grown commercially on this land?
- A: No.
- Q: I've never been able to pin down when this asparagus business stopped.
- A: Well, I know it was still going on when I was a small girl because I liked horses and I'd hear the horse and the cultivator, plowing it up every spring. I used to go down there and he'd let me ride the horse. That was a section right opposite where I lived that he was using then.
- Q: That is very interesting information. What can you tell me about Captain Smith?

- A: His wife was the sister of the man who gave the money for the Town Hall (Timothy Smith). There were a lot of Smiths in those days. Her name was Julia. We called her Miss Julia. There were a lot of people with the same last name so we used to call them by their first names. Timothy Smith had a big department store in Boston. He sold all kinds of things. Every weekend he'd have special sales and ads in the newspapers. The Town Hall was given by Timothy Smith. Some people complained that the Town Hall wasn't big enough even back in 1912-1913 when it was built but he never thought so many people would come to live in Eastham.
- Q: Let's go back to when you were growing up. You said you and Della Knowles Macomber were good friends. What kinds of things did you do when you were growing up for play?
- A: Well, we used to slide down hill when there was snow. We played the same sort of games they play now. We knew who lived in every house, and all about them. Now, I don't even know who lives over here (to the south).
- Q: How did you get back and forth?
- A: We walked. When we got older we had bikes. When I was older I worked in the bakery in Orleans in the summer and I had a bike. I didn't go to Normal School right after high school because I had a chance to work in the bakery yearround. So I thought I'd like to go there. But in the second year I gave it up and went to Normal School. The bakery was up in Orleans in the center of town - Bake Shop Road they called it. Guess they call it Cove Road now. This bakery was right next to the garage. Seems to me there was a blacksmith shop next door.
- Q: When you were growing up did your mother go to the grocery store?
- A: In those days we had grocers who came around and took orders. Ellis' in Orleans was one. They came on Tuesday mornings. They'd get the order from the housewife and then they'd bring it in the afternoon. In North Eastham there was a man named Brackett. He used to come three days a week. I think Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Taking orders and then bringing them the next day.
- Q: Then you used him or both of them and you didn't have to go to the grocery store?
- A: No, we didn't have to go because they brought them. Then, they had the market, too. They had everything in the grocery store, meat, etc. Ellis' was on Cove Road.



When you were growing up, your mother got groceries from these stores?

Yes, I remember her saying that in those days, if she needed anything from the store or the drug store, if she saw someone going by she'd ask them to get it for her.

We didn't have a telephone for quite awhile. Everyone was glad to do such a thing. Friendly. The road was stone and oiled. That was terrible in the summer. We'd get oil on our shoes!

You mentioned brothers. How many brothers did you have?

Three. Carl and Carroll and Everett Gross. Carl and Carroll were twins.

What did your father do?

He was in the Coast Guard.

Your mother's brother was in the Coast Guard, too?

Yes. His name was Frank Lincoln.

Do you have any remembrance of any of the children you taught?

Oh yes. I still remember them. They know me too. Somebody stopped me in the Stop and Shop the other day and said, "Didn't you teach me in the first grade?" I said yes. Named Erickson. I didn't remember him. I had his sisters and I remember them. Someone else I saw said, "You look just the same" and I said "I must have looked awfully old!" I'm 94. I will be 95 if I live until January.

You look as if you're in very good health.

Well, that's it! I don't get any consolation at all! But I do try to take care of myself.

We didn't travel around too much. We didn't have a horse or means of transportation, you know. We did after awhile. We used my grandfather's barn for the horse because it was right next door. We did have a horse for awhile. Then we had bicycles. I had three brothers and they all had bicycles. Then as they got older they got licenses for driving cars.

What was your maiden name?

Gross. Vesta Gross. My middle name is Lincoln. I think the name Vesta came from the fact that my grandfather's name was Sylvester, Sylvester Hinckley. And, my father had a brother named Sylvester, my uncle. You don't hear that name very much.

You said they started having the children eat lunch at school in the new building. Do you suppose that had anything to do with World War I, that people were working and not home during the day? During the War everyone had to do things to help.

A: I think those who went away to work took their families. My brother lived down in Wellfleet and when he went to Quincy to work he moved his family up there with him. One thing we did do at school during the War was to sell Liberty Bond stamps.

I think that was the time my daughter caught scarlet fever. She was playing with a girl named Emond. The girl had been away staying with someone else and she had scarlet fever. She came home and went to school again and then Janet, my daughter, came down with scarlet fever. She was six. She was just getting over it when I came down with it. Then as I was getting over it my mother got it. She had come to stay with us, probably to help me. She didn't get it the way we did. Her arms and hands were affected.

My husband was working in Rhode Island at the time. He would come home weekends. He went with his brother-in-law. Drove down there. As I told you, Helen Clark was his sister. Well, his sister didn't tell him anything about me being sick and Janet also. I called the doctor and he came and said it was scarlet fever. My husband had had it before so he could come in the house. He came from a large family, seven or eight children.

Q: Could you tell me about your mother's family?

A: My mother's father died when she was only five years old. Frank B. Lincoln was my mother's brother. He worked himself up to be a Captain in the Coast Guard. He did it all by himself. He had six children. They are all scattered around. He died in 1968. The year after my husband died in 1967.

Q: Was your husband ill before he died?

A: He was eight years older than I was. My uncle was about his age. My uncle, Frank Lincoln, lived in the square yellow house down here. The land was surveyed and cut up into lots after he died. Lots of cottages down on the shore.

Q: When you and your husband were married - what kinds of things did you do for entertainment with your friends?

A: Well, I belonged to the American Legion Auxiliary. He was a Legionaire. Church - the Orleans Methodist Church. It was a long way to the Eastham Methodist Church. When we were kids there was a girl who lived in the house where the motel is - Eagle Wing Motel - Bessie Blake and she was the organist at the Universalist Church in Eastham. They had a horse so they would load us up with children and we'd go down there for Sunday School at the church.

A: At one time we went to the Methodist Church in Eastham but it was a long way.

Q: How about the Grange?

A: No, but my mother was a member. She was treasurer for quite a few years. I was away at school, then I was away teaching and when I came home I never joined it.

In the years after we had the new Town Hall we had parties every Christmas there. The Grange was the organization that put on the party. I remember going even when Janet was a small girl. At the party the children would sing songs and we would have entertainment. Then we would have a chicken pie supper. There was a baker in Orleans, Clarence Knowles, and he used to make the chicken pies. Everyone used to go to the chicken pie supper on Christmas Eve, I think it was Christmas Eve. There were gifts for the children up to fifteen or so. That was a big thing that went on in the wintertime. They didn't have them before the new Town Hall, as far as I know. They might have had it at one of the churches.

Q: The only thing I can think of that I haven't asked is about the Fourth of July?

A: We went to the parade in Orleans and fireworks over Rock Harbor in Orleans.



